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Recommended Citation

Vazir, N., & Meher, R. (2010). Mentoring in teacher education: Building nurturing contexts and teaching communities for rural primary school teachers in Sindh, Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Research*, 13(1), 123–143.

**Mentoring in Teacher Education:
Building Nurturing Contexts and Teaching Communities for
Rural Primary School Teachers in Sindh, Pakistan**

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Abstract

This paper examines how mentoring can improve the performance and level of teacher education in Pakistan, especially in rural areas. It presents a qualitative case study that focuses on two teachers from rural Sindh; one male and the other female. These teachers were participants in the Mentoring Program at the Aga Khan University – Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED). Data was collected through participant observations, from structured and unstructured interviews, in the classroom and the field, and from reflective journals. The program focused on re-conceptualizing the role of these teachers as mentors, developing relevant skills through critical thinking and reflective practice. The objective was to enhance teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and androgogical skills. After the program in their cluster based schools these teachers assumed roles that addressed the contextual needs of their areas. The research for this study shows that the program helped mentor teachers to move from traditional to progressive approaches to teaching in which not only personal gains were achieved but whole school improvement was observed.

Introduction

Access to quality education in rural areas has been consistently neglected. Today in many parts of the world, growing up in rural areas often means being bereft or receiving sub-standard education.

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Education for rural people lies at the heart of rural development and this is fundamental for reducing poverty world wide contends (Dekoster, 2004). This is further exacerbated in Pakistan by the fact that teaching is a low paid profession which seldom receives laurels and often the services teachers render go unrecognized. Furthermore, the kinds of teacher training offered at institutes remains outdated and traditional, with theory being imparted in traditional lecture modes which often leads to rote and regurgitation and rarely addresses contextual realities and engenders practical outcomes. The stress on academic teaching and learning fails to provide or develop social and moral attributes which are also necessary in relational learning. In Pakistan teaching as a career is seldom given the status it deserves. Moreover, teachers teach the way they have learned on the job or in the manner they have been taught; they may, or may not, have professional training therefore, their journey instead of progressing remains stagnant throughout their life as a teacher or a learner. In addition, professional training especially at the public school level is more concerned with theory and less with practical approaches; a top down approach delivering only content knowledge as information and facts is dominant, rarely teachers learn from each other or collaboratively. Although mentoring is a major way of teacher education in the world today, in Pakistan it is still a very rare process. Hence, the notion of mentoring does not even arise.

However, the role of educational supervisor and learning coordinator is recognized in Pakistan, people in these roles seek to apply knowledge and to instill theoretical and technical skills. There is an even greater need for mentors in rural areas where schools are scattered and populations are large. Generally, literature states that teacher training in Pakistan is on the whole relatively ineffective because it fails to address the contextual realities and situational needs of the students (UNESCO, 2000).

This study sets out to examine how teachers in rural areas of Sindh, Pakistan who were not aware of the notion of mentoring could be helped to become mentors through AKU-IED's Mentoring Program. The word 'mentor' is generally used in a much narrower sense, to mean teacher or advisor. However, we have looked at the role from a broader perspective as a "wise and trusted counselor" (Macquarie

Dictionary, 1997) and as an “experienced and trusted adviser” (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2004).

Hence, the term “mentor” historically denotes a trusted guide and counsellor, and the mentor-protégé relationship a trusting and meaningful association between two individuals with differing levels of experience and knowledge in particular contexts. Literature and research for mentoring has been and continues to be accepted and results demonstrate successful practice. Furthermore, mentoring is recognized as a powerful tool for training professionals and supporting adult learning in education and many other professional fields. Insights gained by Anderson and Shannon (1988) state that the term mentor has a variety of meanings. A mentor is one who serves as a role model, sponsor, encourager, counselor, and friend to a less skilled or less experienced person for the purposes of promoting the latter's professional and/or personal development. It is assumed to involve an ongoing, caring relationship. Thus, a mentor's role can be synonymous with a teacher, coach, trainer, role model, nurturer, leader, talent-developer, and opener-of-doors (Sullivan, 1992).

With the above in mind, the framework of this study was built on the AKU-IED premise that a mentor acts as a role model for others and can make a difference. Mentoring was conceptualized as a four-way process. First, mentoring is an intentional process. The mentor and mentee must be willing and committed towards the process. Second, mentoring is a nurturing process which fosters the growth and development of the mentee toward full maturity. Third, mentoring is an insightful process in which the wisdom of the mentor is acquired and applied by the mentees. Fourth, mentoring is a supportive, protective process. This involves an ongoing caring relationship. The course set out to develop ‘mentors’ as key agents of change based on the belief that “mentoring is a mutual process of sharing experiences, knowledge and wisdom with a less experienced person who will benefit from this exchange” (Zey, 1984:7).

Thus the objective of the program was to develop a person who oversees the career and development of another person usually a junior, through teaching, counseling, providing psychological

support, protecting and at times promoting and sponsoring his / her work. It incorporates our own definition that extends to envisaging a mentor as dynamic, active, visionary, knowledgeable, and skilled; one who has a committed philosophy that keeps the teaching and learning of students in focus; and who guides other leaders to be similarly active and dynamic (Crow and Matthews, 1998).

It has been observed that teacher mentoring programs have dramatically increased since the early 1980s as a vehicle to support and retain novice teachers. The vast majority of what has been written about mentoring has focused on what mentors should believe and do in their work with novice teachers. The professional literature typically describes the benefits for novice teachers (Odell and Huling, 2000). Acting on this premise, it was expected that prospective mentors would participate in professional development to learn about the mentoring process and what is expected of them before assuming their duties (Kyle, Moore, and Sanders, 1999). Research shows that mentor teachers need support and the opportunity to discuss ideas, problems, and solutions with other mentor teachers.

It was perceived that mentors would receive training in adult development and be fully prepared for the all aspects of the relationship. For their preparedness and involvement in the mentoring process, they would receive a handbook detailing the activities they were likely to be involved in and the respective responsibilities of the mentor and mentee outlined. (Mousour, 1998)

AKU IED and Mentoring

The Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) commenced operation in 1993. In its work and priorities, AKU-IED complements, extends and adds value to the work of other agencies which seek effective strategies for social sector development. The AKU-IED focuses on improving the performance of teachers and other stakeholders through offering a variety of professional development opportunities leading to school improvement. Considering the significant contribution of AKU-IED, its role has been recognized as a national partner in the

implementation of Education Sector Reform Assistance Program (ESRA) initiatives funded by USAID.

In order to improve the quality of education in Sindh and Balochistan provinces, the AKU-IED launched its first Certificate in Education: Primary Education Program for supervisors in primary education (SPEs), learning coordinators (LCs) and resource persons (RPs). The program specifically focuses on 'mentoring' as it allows the professional relationship to grow between individuals based on their needs, abilities and available resources. Therefore, through out the program participants get ample opportunities to explore mentoring skills in order to work effectively and help their colleagues in their professional growth. Furthermore, critical thinking and reflective practice are common themes, which are embedded across the program.

Nature of Research

The study employed a qualitative approach that involved two teachers from the rural area of Tehsil⁵ Thari-Mirwah, District Khairpur.

Teacher 'A' (Allah Dino), a male supervisor for primary schools, had fifteen years of teaching experience at the time of study and was responsible for the male schools within one Tehsil in the rural area of Sindh. Teacher 'B' (Rabia) is a female supervisor; with twenty years of teaching experience. In addition to teaching in primary classes she was responsible for fifty-six schools as Supervisor in the same Tehsil, Thari-Mirwah of Khairpur District. These teachers had not been given an opportunity to participate in any teacher education programs during their long service and did not know anything about mentoring or any of its related concepts.

⁵ The province of Sindh has eight districts with these districts teachers were selected from 4 districts (Hyderabad, Thatta, Khairpur, Sukkur). Each district has two to eight Tehsils depending on the size of the area and its population.. A Tehsil is a smaller unit of governance which operates under the Union Council which is a local body at the district level.

A qualitative approach was found to be the most appropriate because data could be collected within a natural surrounding, be gathered by several sources, it was process-oriented, findings could be written in detailed and descriptive manner, and most importantly it would reveal how different people make sense of their lives.



Figure 1: Districts geographical location

The role of AKU-IED was to involve these teachers in mentoring and prepare them as mentors. After completion of Certificate in Education: Mentoring Program (Cert. Ed) program these teachers/mentors would return to their contexts and train teachers in their cluster-based schools, thereby fostering whole school improvement and educational change in their district. These teachers were expected to work as mentors who provide similar experiences to their cluster school teachers who are their mentees.

The data sources for this study include informal conversations, classroom and field observations, and the reflective journals they maintained throughout the program. The program was developed as a field-based program spread over a period of three months and

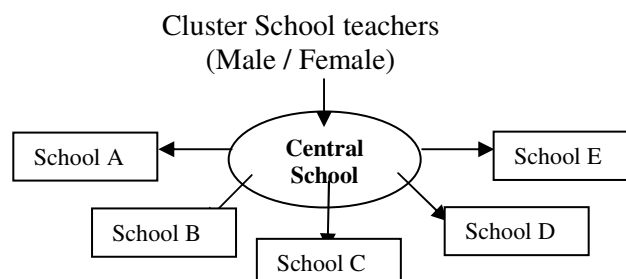
specifically focused on developing the participants' skills of 'mentoring' that allowed the course participants to establish professional relationships between individuals based on their needs and available resources. Throughout the program participants were provided opportunities to explore mentoring skills in order to work effectively and help their colleagues to grow professionally. Furthermore, 'critical thinking' and 'reflective practice' were common themes that were embedded in the program.

During their first phase at AKU-IED the Course Participants (CPs) were encouraged to rethink their existing beliefs, attitudes and practices towards teaching and learning. CPs was encouraged to think critically and to write reflective journals in order to improve their mentoring skills and practices. All quotes sated in the paper are original. They were translated from Urdu (National language) to English language. It was ensured that the meaning was not lost during translations.

Mentoring Program at AKU-IED

Table-1: Model of Cluster Schools

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Province (Sindh) | | | |
| District (Khairpur) | | | |
| Tehsil (Thari-Mirwah) | | | |
| Central School as Resource Centre (Male) | | Central School as Resource Centre (Female) | |



The course participants explored alternatives for enhancing their understanding about the role and philosophy to improve their

mentoring skills. Moreover, the CPs engaged in 'hands-on and minds-on' activities in order to enhance their content knowledge in core subject areas and learn new ways of integrating different subjects at the primary school level. This phase of the program predominantly focuses on the theoretical and practical aspects of the role of a mentor as a role model, sponsor, encourager, counselor and friend to a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and personal development (Anderson and Shannon, 1998).

Through the process of activity-based learning the participants enhanced their pedagogical content knowledge in core subject areas and developed ways of integrating different subjects. These group-based activities were very well accepted by the course participants and responses were positive and encouraging. For instance, Rabia and Allah-Dino mention in their reflection that:

There are many advantages of group based learning. Students will also enjoy in the same way as we have by being given several opportunities to work in groups. It helps us to think individually and also more effectively by sharing ideas through discussion with our colleagues (Rabia).

We had no such experience of working in groups before IED mentoring program, we would hide our work from each other. There was competition. Now we learn through group work that encourages us to work cooperatively and not competitively. I hope that my students will also enjoy learning in the same manner through sharing ideas and caring that we all learn and not only I (emphasis) learn (Allah –Dino).

The CPs acquainted themselves with a variety of professional development approaches for working with their cluster teachers. They developed mentoring skills such as peer coaching, team teaching and designing workshops together. The mentors learned how to provide support, encouragement and guidance to their cluster teachers.

We applied these newly learned techniques in our cluster. According to our environment I introduced low-cost and no-cost resource concepts. We did peer coaching; a totally new idea because we usually have one teacher schools in our district. We introduced a system for receiving teaching and learning comments, as reflections, in the same manner as IED faculty did. This was something we had never thought of before (Rabia).

In rural areas teachers have lots of problems related to classroom teaching, especially in Primary Schools. They have less subject content knowledge and seldom know any teaching strategy other than lecturing. Cluster schools workshops for teachers helped teachers to learn from each other and practice peer coaching and team teaching (Allah-Dino).

CPs were also exposed to various strategies such as activity-based but active learning, co-operative and inquiry based learning, questioning and problem solving. These new strategies developed in them skills of becoming a good mentor:

An activity that is done professionally I have learned should be done with co-operation and coordination. We should give importance to the views of others and express our own views in simple language and manner if needs are to be addressed and learning is to take place. Moreover, teachers develop a sense of ownership if they are also contributors in their learning process. Learners learn better by being actively involved. I learned that all activity based learning is not necessarily active learning. I thought the two were the same. Now I have understood the difference (Allah-Dino).

We had this idea before too that we should provide the child with opportunity to learn through activities so that the child learns from his own experience. Children should be provided with an environment in which they are free to express their ideas. But this does not mean that the teacher leaves all learning for children. The teacher as I understand constructs and builds on children's ideas. This is really active learning (Rabia).

During the second phase, the field based component, the mentors returned to their respective contexts to practice their newly acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Mentors engaged in teaching, shared their experiences of real classrooms situations and received critical feedback which they incorporated in their successive teaching practice. During this period they were facilitated by the AKU-IED team who continued to mentor them. The CPs applied the group-based activities in their classroom teaching and saw considerable changes:

We are a role model now to others and go on and teach what we have learned at IED. When we go in our cluster schools and teach. Teachers are able to identify the role of a good teacher without us 'telling' them. The context of each district is different. We try to incorporate methods suitable to their context so that the quality of education improves in our schools. In our cluster schools we demonstrate how children can work on their own as well as with others to improve their skills and learn from others, rather than only from the textbook, while the teachers can act as a guide for them (Rabia).

The mentor role is challenging for us, we have learned at IED in such a way that we have developed and grown professionally. We must improve our classroom teaching skills. I am aware of the need to communicate with each other. This helped me to better understand my own role as a supervisor. Changing my role from ordering to guiding is very hard. The more I reflect I understand it does not undermine my power as a supervisor. A mentor can be an effective supervisor if he is equipped with better understanding of his role. My new role makes me feel good (Allah-Dino).

Both mentors played their role actively. Reflective practice and critical thinking helped them to reflect on their own beliefs about teaching, student learning and teaching as a profession. It also provided them with opportunities to confirm the experience they have gained through the program. Reflective practice in mentoring can also provide an opportunity for renewal and regeneration necessary for all adults. Mentoring enhances mentors' self-esteem

(Wollman-Bonilla, 1997). The experience of mentoring empowers experienced teachers and gives them a greater sense of significance in their world (Carger, 1996). Mentors as observed in the field and through their reflections derive satisfaction from helping less experienced colleagues (Scott, 1999). Mentors frequently describe their mentoring contribution as a way of giving back to the teaching profession (Boreen, Johnson, Niday and Potts, 2000).

As mentors the teachers established a mini resource center at the central school of their cluster. They conducted and evaluated a workshop for cluster school teachers. They were enthusiastic about teaching newly acquired subject matter and approaches to teaching the subject to their fellow cluster teacher (*see cluster school workshop figures on page 20*):

As a mentor I have learnt now that I have to be sincere about bringing changes in our educational field. I will begin with myself and my classroom (Allah-Dino).

Teaching is already a very low paid profession so the salary is not that important it is the pride. I feel and the respect I get that makes it worthwhile. The teachers tell me I smile more. This is the sign of a good mentor (Rabia). These reflections clearly indicate the personal self actualization as well as the professional self emerging in their new roles.

Initial Research Findings

Key findings evident at the three stages are as follows:

1. Before AKU-IED Program

Before introducing the new techniques and methods of teaching the participants were re-conceptualizing their existing notions of current practices in Primary Education, in which their responses showed that they mostly followed the traditional methods for teaching where students were passive listeners and learning was mostly teacher-centered. They were not aware of the concept of mentoring and how that could be applied for educational change, which leads towards school improvement

Although the participants were educational supervisors and coordinators, their role was administrative rather than academically supportive. In their reflection both the mentors emphasize that:

Before coming to AKU-IED, Mentoring Program we did not get any opportunity to learn such skills, which would change our beliefs and notions about our curriculum and syllabus. We learned how important objectives are and how they should match with the outcomes of Primary Education. We were not aware about the concept of mentoring in teacher education. I believe we can help to bring some change for improving our government schools school and teacher education curriculum (Allah-Dino).

As a supervisor before coming to this program, we were not clear about our role. I realize for bringing change in the quality of education we have to think differently. I will discuss and work with the support of my officials and community once I return home. I want that teachers work sincerely and more effectively and they perform there role more efficiently. When you visit our site I may have made a small difference (Rabia).

During the Program

CPs' reflections and classroom observation during the course reveal that they changed some of their beliefs and notions about teaching and learning. The program helped them to enhance pedagogical content knowledge and skills through activity based learning, while realizing the importance of students' in the learning process helped them to think about their own practices (*See classroom activities on page 20*). As both participants explain:

The program enhanced our subject content knowledge mainly in Language, Social Studies, Science and Mathematics. We can teach our classes in a better way, not only from textbooks but by using other resource material as well. The challenge however remains to develop these resources, but we have at least made a beginning, the rest will follow (Rabia).

We were facing difficulties while teaching concepts of Science and Mathematics but now we have the experience how to learn through practical work / hands-on activities through simple low cost

materials, which help in learning. We can use these methods in our cluster schools workshops with our teachers; especially where funds are limited. We will need to think of ways to deal with large class sizes (Allah-Dino).

The program focused on mentoring skills, so as to develop them as Mentors and Pedagogical Leaders. CPs discusses their new roles compared with this previous experience as supervisors:

As supervisors we just visited the schools to check general routine administration. We never thought about giving the teachers' professional support to improve their teaching and learning. We did not think that as important as fulfilling our real responsibilities we never thought about academic support we now realize that our role and responsibilities go much beyond supervision (Rabia).

Our Mentoring Program experiences helped us develop our mentoring skills and leadership qualities through a structured professional development program. Our practice teaching experiences and observation and coaching skills in giving feedback to our colleagues about teaching, provided a valuable amount of learning for our own future role and responsibilities (Allah-Dino).

After the Program

After completion of Phase One, mentors returned to their context to practice and implement their newly acquired roles beginning a one-year field-based mentoring program for their cluster school teachers. During Phase Two they were observed in the field when they conducted workshops for their cluster based school teachers at central schools. They had developed a resource centre for teachers in each of the central schools. AKU-IED facilitators visited the participants for follow-up support. The following findings are some initiatives that they undertook and that are evident of their learning as mentors.

Mentor Professional Competency

As mentor teachers assist their protégées in improving their teaching, they also improve their own professional competence. Several studies have documented the positive effects of mentoring on the

mentors themselves (Gordon and Maxey, 2000). The quality of teaching by mentors improves (Yosha, 1991). Mentors benefit by applying cognitive coaching skills with their students such as listening, asking inquisitive questions, providing non-judgmental feedback, and by reassessing their classroom management (Clinard and Ariav, 1998). The same responses were given by mentors:

As a mentor now I can help in developing my own Cluster School Teachers to solve there classroom teaching problems, for example, like how to plan a lesson for a multi-grade class, by considering different options and strategies I acquired as new learning experiences those that I developed through the AKU-IED Mentoring Program. My own subject content knowledge enhanced. I was not aware about the language skills nor how to develop activities for students according to the need at different levels. Now that I have practiced I know better.

Before coming to the Program in my opinion Social Studies was a boring subject, for that reason I always avoided teaching it. Now I realize it is an interesting and a valuable subject to be taught as citizenship education. For this it is important to build children's attitude and develop them as critical thinkers. The way in which I myself was involved as a learner provided me an opportunity to learn from my facilitators and coordinators. Now I am willing to teach this subject in my school and demonstrate in my cluster-based mentoring workshops what social action is all about and not simply as geography and history (Allah-Dino).

Reflective Practitioner and Critical Thinker

Mentors report that mentoring has forced them to be reflective about their own beliefs about teaching, students' learning, and teaching as a career. It also provided them with opportunities to validate the experience they gained over the years (Ganser, 1997). Mentors found that just as teachers learn more about their subject by teaching, so analyzing and talking about teaching was a natural opportunity for them to deepen their teaching sensitivity and skill (Tomlinson, 1995). These critical reflective mentors found that they are more focused in their mentoring relationships; they applied more and acted

more energetically, took more informed action, and were generally more satisfied with their mentoring relationships.

Reflective practice in mentoring provided them an opportunity for renewal and regeneration which they considered necessary as adults. This drive to improve themselves was essential for them as it helped reduce the threat of stagnation in their later years (Daloz, 1999; Stevens, 1995) about which they were worried. Their journals were tools for growth through critical reflection. It was not enough to observe and record experiences, but 'equally important' as the ability to make meaning out of what was expressed (Clark 1994: 355), especially in Pakistan where teachers do not have a writing and recording culture. This was a significant and purposeful move to improve their practice both mentors said that:

Reflection and critical thinking greatly facilitated us into organizing Multi-grade teaching, planning the curriculum, re-looking at its narrowness, appreciating, and understanding the differences and re-looking at the notions of curriculum, syllabus and scheme of studies, role of text books and our role as teachers and mediators of the prescribed official offered curriculum. Earlier which we conceived as acceptable doable, the same we now challenge (Rabia).

Reflective writing is a critical component in meaning making, enabling learners to communicate connections between new information and what we already knew. For me the journal became another text on which to reflect, but it was a text written in the learner's (my) real voice, and this personal engagement added a necessary affective element to my learning process (Allah-Dino).

Reflective Journals are useful learning tools. Before AKU-IED Program I was very rigid. I taught through the teacher- centered method. After continuous critical thinking and reflection I realized that in order to develop the child holistically, a child-centered method is more appropriate. My experience in the classroom (children's interest) in their learning convinced me of this approach (Rabia).

Teacher Leadership

Mentor training and experiences at IED helped build mentors' capacity for leadership through structured professional development. During field observation, as their coaching skills surfaced mentors become recognized for their valuable knowledge and expertise in the areas and were sought out for various campus and district leadership roles. This is what we gathered on our visits to the schools through conversations with local teachers. Literature states what our study reveals and what the head teachers also recalled, namely that it is not uncommon for mentors to move into leadership positions as a result of their success as mentors. It is often the case that they are more effective in these new positions because of the training and insights they receive as mentors. In this connection the two mentors reflected that:

In planning the workshops for the cluster school teachers we are now giving more time in planning and especially consider subject content knowledge. For this we read more from other books and not only the prescribed text book so that we can help cluster teachers during workshop sessions. The credit goes to the program and our institutions, which provided opportunities to build on what we had learned as mentors as combined elements of mentoring and teaching (Allah-Dino).

Before the mentoring program we think of ourselves as boss but this thought has changed and we are now thinking positively of others as equals. Now we are working for improvement and teachers are now working in a friendly environment with out any fear or threat. Teachers work together and learn from each other's experiences. We are now working on academic aspects for teaching and learning and feel more responsible ourselves as mentors (Rabia).

Mentoring combined with Inquiry

Working with cluster-based school teachers leads mentors to act as researchers. These mentors who participated in inquiry critically examine their own practice which leads them to become aware of the complexity of their role in teaching and supervising. The benefits of mentoring programs were substantial for both mentee and mentor teachers. The mentors began to ask the important "Why" question. Both mentors said in their response:

Asking the 'why' questions allows me to reflect, share my practice in order to improve my cluster school teachers practices. Helping them in a systematic way enables them to develop processes by which they can question their own practice through critical reflection and taking actions. Thinking systematically and critically about what is taught and how it is taught requires commitment and understanding. We often share these experiences with each other (Rabia).

Through mentoring I can identify and plan my own agenda for learning and development. I am now realizing that sharing practice is essential to professional learning. Questioning, understanding and acknowledging my ability, strength and weakness within the teaching-learning environment is a powerful form of professional learning. This was a great leaning experience for me in AKU-IED Program (Allah-Dino).

These responses show their thinking process and reflect what the literature says about mentoring being an active relationship built on negotiation and trust. It is not the mentor's role to dominate, judge and be overtly critical. Rather the mentor should develop a relationship built on constructive criticism, support and a relationship that allows for development. In short, mentoring is a process through which knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities, may be passed on to less experienced practitioners (Blandford, 2000).

Working with Colleagues

A common experience of the IED teaching depicts team teachers usually do not allow their colleagues into their classrooms and remain in isolation without sharing and providing professional support to each other due to many reasons that need to be explored. Research literature on school culture and staff development i.e. Hargreaves & Dawes (1990), Hargreaves & Reynolds (1989), Huberman & Miles (1984) and Fullan (1982) have highlighted the importance of releasing teachers from their isolation by "cracking the walls of privatism" and emphasized collaboration among the teachers for their professional development. In this connection, while working in the field mentors were observed supporting each other and offering suggestions, giving and receiving constructive

qualitative feedback and sharing concerns with each other, as reflected in the following observations:

For me the most important learning aspect is mentoring, in which professional learning emphasizes guidance, development and the use and enhancement of individual abilities. Preparation for the role of mentor is the key in facilitating the learning of the mentee (Rabia).

As we have gone through the process of mentoring skills, it was my great learning experience that mentoring is regarded as one such system to facilitate professional learning and thus create change. Such professional learning stems from the belief that individuals may best learn through observing, doing, commenting and questioning, rather than simply listening (Allah –Dino).

From the above reflections it seems to be quite evident that teaching is one of the loneliest professions, with teachers rarely having the opportunity to work with a colleague in a collaborative way so that they can learn more about the teaching-learning process. Mentoring in one form or another is a means by which teachers can break down their isolation and support professional learning in ways that focus on the daily work of teachers and teaching-learning situations.

The above findings support the view that the mentoring program helped to transform more teachers from traditional to new methods of teaching on a path that leads from educational reform to transformation. Cluster-based mentoring program will continue to support teachers for an ongoing school improvement plan.

Conclusion

The study re-emphasizes the importance of cluster-based mentoring programs as a powerful agency for the professional development of teachers, especially in rural areas. Where access to education and training are marginal, the role of mentors is significant. Therefore, it is imperative that these programs are institutionalized so that maximum benefit can reach the deprived areas. The role of mentors as “change agents” is seen as exemplary; they are committed to fostering a mentoring and enabling environment and capacity building result-based achievement (3rd Quarterly Report, July-

September 2004). However, given the positive learning experiences of these teachers, AKU-IED must ensure the sustainability of the new roles of mentors by supporting them in the field so that mentors do not get frustrated nor feel alone in their venture or pursuit to bring about meaningful change in their rural environment and return to traditional practices.

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